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WILDLIFE SERVICES—ALABAMA

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Alabama

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Alabama Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

Alabama is a diverse mix of urban and suburban settings, agricultural lands, and forests all with high populations of wildlife. As Alabama's human population grows, conflicts with wildlife have also increased.

WS biologists help Alabama farmers control losses to birds and predators. A biologist, located at the Alabama Fish Farming Center, is devoted specifically to addressing bird predation at aquaculture facilities where losses are estimated at several million dollars annually. WS biologists also address beaver damage to Alabama's transportation infrastructure and timber resources; protect the lives of pilots, air passengers, and aircraft from dangerous wildlife collisions with airplanes; assist with monitoring and control of wildlife-vectored human diseases such as rabies and West Nile virus; and assist in protecting threatened or endangered species from other wildlife predators.



Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting agricultural commodities
- Protecting aquaculture resources from migratory bird predation
- Protecting timber resources and transportation infrastructure from beaver damage
- Protecting human health and safety from wildlife-vectored diseases such as rabies and West Nile virus
- Protecting passengers and aircraft from collisions with wildlife

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Alabama:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Managing bird predation to aquaculture in the Southeastern United States
- Controlling wildlife vectors of rabies and bovine tuberculosis
- Managing beaver damage to timber and other forest resources
- Improving rodent damage management methods

Protecting Agricultural Resources—Agriculture is the most important industry in Alabama with annual farm receipts of \$4.87 billion. More than 21 percent of Alabama's workforce is employed in agriculture-related jobs. The State ranks second nationally in catfish production and ranks high in timber, poultry, and forest products as well. Agricultural losses to wildlife include livestock predation, bird depredation to crops, flooding of timber lands by beaver, and catfish losses to migratory birds. More than \$19 million is lost annually because of beaver damage to timber and almost \$4 million is lost annually from bird depredation at aquaculture facilities.

WS biologists work closely with the Alabama Department of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, the Alabama Farmers Federation, and the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries to address these problems. WS personnel conduct bird roost dispersal efforts to reduce the number of birds in aquaculture areas.

In addition, WS assists catfish producers in developing the most effective control programs available with current technology. WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) is investigating the migratory movements and feeding behavior of fish-eating birds and is

working to develop new management methods in Alabama to reduce the economic losses that result from depredation.

Fish-eating birds are not the only wildlife causing damage to agriculture in Alabama. WS biologists provide technical assistance and management recommendations as well as train landowners on beaver damage management. WS direct assistance includes water level manipulation; exclusion; population reduction; and the safe, effective use of explosives by a certified specialist to remove beaver dams that can cause extensive flooding.

Protecting Air Travel—WS is recognized internationally for its scientific expertise in reducing wildlife hazards to the aviation industry. Experts estimate that wildlife strikes with airplanes cost the U.S. civil aviation industry more than \$470 million annually in the United States. Alabama has major airports on the coast and inland that must manage a variety of potential wildlife hazards.

WS scientists at NWRC conduct research to understand the nature of wildlife hazards at airports, develop management tools to reduce these hazards, and provide airport personnel with information to manage or prevent these hazards. Applying this scientific expertise, the Alabama WS program has provided airports in the State with technical assistance, training, and direct operational management. WS has reduced the presence of wildlife on and around runways by up to 80 percent at these airports.

Protecting Public Health—Wildlife may infect humans with disease or act as human disease carriers. With expanding human populations and the loss of wildlife habitat, wild animals are coming into closer contact with humans and increasing the risk of transmitting wildlife-borne diseases such as rabies.

Alabama WS is involved in several human health and wildlife disease-related projects, many in conjunction with the Alabama Department of Public Health. WS cooperates with homeowners and business owners, many in underprivileged areas, to exclude bats from their buildings. Bats can pose a year-round rabies and histoplasmosis (fungus that causes lung infections) threat to humans. In addition, Alabama WS distributes brochures and pamphlets explaining to homeowners and private operators how to best exclude bats from inhabited buildings.

Alabama WS also works closely with State public health officials to coordinate a Statewide West Nile virus and arbovirus (carried by insects, spiders, and crustaceans) surveillance program. Since it was first identified in the United States in 1999, West Nile virus has

become more and more widespread. In the summer of 2002, the Southern United States was hit especially hard by this emerging disease. Alabama WS surveillance efforts help to locate any outbreaks of viruses in wild birds, mosquitoes, or other mammals.

In addition, Alabama WS is currently implementing a raccoon rabies surveillance program to locate areas in the State where the disease has advanced. This surveillance work is part of a Nationwide effort to determine the bounds of the virus within the United States. Traditionally, rabies has been a problem in the Eastern United States, but the virus continues to move westward. In Alabama, WS is surveying to determine if the virus has spread west of two natural barriers: the Alabama and Coosa rivers. Based on the results, WS will recommend strategies for controlling the spread of raccoon rabies within the State.

Looking to the Future

While WS resolves a diverse range of wildlife conflicts, there is an increasing demand for services in the State. Wildlife diseases such as rabies are posing greater threats to people, livestock, and pets. Populations of fish-eating birds continue to increase and threaten Alabama's growing aquaculture industry. Lack of sport trapping due to a decline in the fur market is contributing to continued increases in the beaver population and some predator problems. Finally, introduced species, such as feral hogs, are a rapidly growing wildlife management problem.

Alabama Wildlife Services Funding •••••

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

